Capt. E.O. Davis, retired Houston Yacht Club harbor master, knew John Kolius when he was a Ragnot at HYC.

Above: A scrapbook full of America's Cup photos and stories, particularly those of John Kolius and his Courageous crew, was presented to the skipper and his wife Donna by former HYC Commodore Ed Bluestein.

Right: John Kolius' stepdaughter, Kagan Owens, checked out the America's Cup scrapbook.

Wise words: 'Never give up your dreams'

Cool, John Kolius, superstar sailor of the Great Southwest, presented to the young Ragnots at Houston Yacht Club a framed poster of the Courageous, the 12-meter boat that almost represented America in the America's Cup races in Newport, R.I., this summer.


Native Houstonian Kolius made the presentation last Sunday at a champagne reception given in his honor at Houston Yacht Club.

Between 40 and 50 Ragnots, junior sailors between the ages of 8 and 18, were in the crowd of 500 that also included HYC Commodore James Tichener and nine ex-commodores — Bill Heinz, William O. Strong, Tom Crawford, Clark Thompson, Robert Middletom, Ed DeJong, Al Fell, Ed Bluestein and Tycen Sparks.

A number of visitors from Lakewood Yacht Club also were at the celebration along with a group of John's contemporaries who came to salute the young sailor and his charming wife, Donna.

The Yacht Club made a presentation, too. A plaque featured half hulls from boats that John has skippered to fame — Soling, J-24 and the 12-meter Courageous.

The former Olympian is Captain Courageous, not only to the Ragnots but to all members of the sailing community in these parts who saw this 33-year-old Kolius, youngest skipper in America's Cup history, and his crew tried valiantly during the trials to be numero uno.

As the history books will relate, Dennis Conner and the Liberty won the American trials and then later lost in the finals to Aussie skipper John Bertrand and Australia II.

Now Kolius, still hanging onto that dream, is the leading contender to skipper the American challenger when next the world-class sailors meet in Perth — three, or perhaps four years, depending on the wishes of the home team.

A syndicate out of the New York Yacht Club — home of the America's Cup for 139 years — contacted Kolius immediately after the races. A new boat will be constructed.

These are exciting times for young Kolius, whose name now is included in the firm name of an international sail-making company. It now reads Kolius Ulmer Sailmakers Inc. and has shops in the United States, Canada, England and Japan. John has been associated at the Sea-brook franchise and has worked in research and development.

The former Ragnot the attended Rogers Junior High, Robert E. Lee High School and the University of Houston; won the National Junior Sailing championship when he was 17 and two years later won the senior North American Sailing Championship.

He was a member of the 1976 Olympic sailing team that won a silver medal at the games in Montreal in 1976. He was the skipper of a three-man crew in the Soling class.

John learned how to sail at age 7 with his dad, prominent attorney Gus Kolius, who now spends six months of the year on his 35-foot trawler in the Bahamas.

His older sisters, Susan and Catherine, were sailing instructors at the Girl Scout camp, Casa Mar on Galveston Bay, says their father Catherine is now Mrs. John Focke of Houston, and Susan lives in Leon, France, as Madame Christian Trouillot-Buyat.

Left: The story of skipper John Kolius, far right, and his winning boat ways is told in the plaque of half hulls presented to him at the Houston Yacht Club's reception in his honor. Boats represented are the Soling, J-24 and the 12-meter Courageous. Making the presentation are, from left, HYC Commodore James Tichener and John's brother-in-law, John Folkie.

Hurricane Alicia dealt Houston Yacht Club harbor a severe blow but recovery is well under way. Checking it out are, left to right, Barry Dobbs; HCY Commodore James Tichener; Lakewood Yacht Club Vice Commodore Don Rauscher; and John Kolius, skipper of the 12-meter Courageous during the recent America's Cup qualifying trials in Newport. John was the honoree at a welcome-home champagne reception at HYC.